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Get creative this Lent: A parish program for Earth care

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Eco Catholic

I know it's not fair. You just came out of the busy Christmas liturgical season, and here I am asking you to be thinking about Lent already. It's just that I wanted to put my two-cents in early before all the Lenten plans were made. I'm aware that many parishes have certain Lenten traditions that they stick to, but if you're a little tired of the status quo and want a fresh idea for a Lent, I'd like to share what our parish did a couple of years ago.

Our Green Team is always looking for ways to educate our parishioners on connections between faith and caring for the Earth, so Lent seemed like an ideal time for this. We wanted ecology to be a total parish theme, so got buy-in and approval from the pastor and parish council. This was easy, because I think most church leaders are happy to have a parish group take the initiative on a new project.

Here were all the elements of our program: 1) A weekly ecology film and discussion 2) Brief presentations by outside speakers after Sunday masses in Lent 3) Liturgical elements including music, preaching, and a prayer for the Earth 4) A weekly bulletin column and one-time insert with suggested Lenten disciplines related to ecology and 5) A Saturday morning retreat called, "On Fire for the Earth."

One of the ways we got parishioners initially involved was having them fill out a survey of program preferences. Then it was easy to say, "You asked for this." We positioned the program around this quote by the U.S. Bishops from their 1991 document *Renewing the Earth*: "The environmental crisis of our day constitutes an exceptional call to conversion. As individuals, as institutions, as a people, we need a change of heart to save the planet for our children and generations yet unborn." Thus we encountered no resistance.

I think people were happy to have alternative suggestions for Lenten penance, something more meaningful and ultimately beneficial than "giving up candy." The evening film series, which included *The End of Suburbia*, *The Story of Stuff*, *Kilowatt Ours*, *Blue Nuns Go Green*

, and *Faces of Food*, were well-received. So was the accompanying popcorn. We debated about whether to have an adult education talk between the masses each Sunday, but the people chose the option of a 10-minute speaker in church right after the masses. We were a bit worried about a mass exodus, but most of the people stayed for the speaker.

I offered to give our pastor ideas for including Earth stewardship in his homilies and he was most grateful. I was a little embarrassed one week, however, when he read my ideas verbatim and gave me public credit! Not quite what I had in mind.

Here is the prayer I wrote that we prayed at Masses in Lent. We also made copies for people to take home and pray.

Prayer for the Earth

Creator God, we praise and thank You for the wonders and beauty of creation. You have made all things with love to reflect your glory and goodness. We especially thank you for this living planet, that has sustained us and all life for eons.

We pray for the wellbeing of your creation, that we and all people protect and reverence it. We pray for clean air, pure water and fertile land, all animal and plant life, and the human community.

Through the redemption wrought by Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, may we be empowered to live and work in partnership with creation so all life can flourish as You intend. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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If you would like copies of any of our materials, including publicity and the sheet of Lenten Disciplines on Earth Care, please let me know. You can contact me at wisdomways@planetkc.com and I will email them to you. And feel free to use the prayer too. Let me know if I can be of help. Good luck!

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